

Joint Housing Protocol

For West Sussex Children We Care for
and Care Leavers

August 2025



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1 Introduction

1.1 The journey out of care is a key transition in a young person's life and careful planning and support is needed to ensure this transition is successful.

1.2 At the heart of this protocol, is wanting to improve housing options, provide good housing pathways and prevent housing crisis and homelessness for our care leavers. The objective is to have a seamless partnership between housing and the care leavers service (CLS) to deliver this aim. It is important to reflect that demand for affordable housing whether social or privately rented is high and therefore can present challenges and take time to achieve. In West Sussex we have seven Districts and Boroughs and some of these do not have their own housing stock and use registered providers to provide social housing. This protocol will help to ensure that young people moving on from care settings have access to advice and support at the earliest opportunity to identify their options, to achieve a settled, affordable home.

1.3 National guidance published in October 2020 jointly by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and the Department for Education (DfE) sets out how children's services and local housing authorities should develop strategies to provide a range of accommodation options to meet the needs of young people as they leave care, as well as avert crisis and homelessness.

1.4 This document is a Joint Housing Protocol between West Sussex County Council (WSCC) and the local housing authorities – Adur District Council, Arun District Council, Chichester District Council, Crawley Borough Council, Horsham District Council, Mid Sussex District Council and Worthing Borough Council. The Protocol sets out our commitment as 'Corporate Parents' (see 1.12) to support care leavers and describes how these commitments are delivered in practice.

1.5 The Protocol has been created over several stages and West Sussex care leavers have been consulted and involved in decision making at every step of its development.

Quote from the Care Leavers Advisory Board 2023

1.6 "This Protocol aims to outline how best to support care leavers with their housing needs. Although it may seem like another guidance document to you, for care leavers it's a really important piece of work that is going to provide the framework for our future. This guidance hopes to provide security for care leavers and to allow them to start their journey to independence with the most support possible, while trying to prevent yet another tribulation to overcome before we can successfully transition into adulthood and achieve serenity."

Primary Aims

1.7 To achieve and maintain successful joint working between WSCC and the seven district and borough local housing authorities to ensure that care leavers receive appropriate and effective support from their corporate parents.

This protocol is written in the knowledge that the local government reorganisation of West Sussex is scheduled to take place in 2028. The protocol will be reviewed at that time to reflect the geographical area of the new local authority(s) and how these processes are contained within to ensure the same high level of services are delivered to Care Leavers across the area.

1.8 To ensure care leavers have good housing opportunities that will provide them with stability, security and is suitable to their needs.

1.9 To ensure care leavers are fully informed of their rights, entitlements, and housing options to enable them to make informed choices.

1.10 To ensure young people who are leaving care receive the support needed to develop the skills and preparation required for independent living.

1.11 A commitment to prevent care leavers becoming homeless and the use of nightly paid shared accommodation (NPSA), sometimes referred to as bed and breakfast (B&B), will be avoided wherever possible. If required in an emergency, use of B&B will be kept to as short a time as is possible or practical.

Corporate Parenting

1.12 Corporate parenting is a commitment from local authorities to do everything they can for care experienced young people and care leavers. That is, to provide the same opportunities other children and young people receive from any good parent to promote the best possible outcomes for them. Children's Services and local housing authorities share corporate parenting responsibilities and in carrying out their functions, must have regard to the following principles:

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1. To act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and wellbeing, of those children and young people.
 2. To encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings.
 3. To consider the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people.
 4. To help those children and young people gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners.
 5. To promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people.
 6. For those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work.
 7. To prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living.

1.13 Research and practice highlights that young people who have been looked after will have the best chance of success as an adult, if those providing transitional care and support, take the following principles into account when talking to the young person and when making any decision:

- Is this good enough for my own child?
- Is this tailored to their individual needs, particularly if they are more vulnerable than other young people?
- Providing a second chance if things don't go as expected.

(Children Act 1989: transition to adulthood for care leavers guidance. Volume 3. Revision date January 2022)

Eligibility

1.14 This Protocol specifically applies to all WSCC young people aged 16 up until their 25th birthday who meet the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 criteria, including the following:

1.15 Eligible young people aged 16 or 17 who are either subject to a care order or who are accommodated by the local authority for at least 13 weeks since their 14th birthday including on or after their 16th birthday.

1.16 Relevant young people aged 16 or 17 who are no longer looked after but for whom children's services are responsible for maintaining suitable accommodation and providing financial support. These young people cannot, subject to some exceptions due to a disability or being a parent, claim welfare benefits.

1.17 Former relevant young people aged 18 to 24 who have previously been either eligible or relevant. These young people can access benefits but continue to receive leaving care support services.

1.18 Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) who qualify for a leaving care service and have been granted refugee status or those that have an appropriate leave to remain status (NB if a young person has made an in-time appeal on their pre-18 leave to remain status, then according to Section 3 of the Immigration Act 1971, they are considered by the Home Office to still have their original leave to remain).

Legislation and Guidance

1.19 This document refers to the following legislation:

- [Housing Act 1996 \(Part VI\)](#)
- [Housing Act 1996 \(Part VII\)](#)
- [Homelessness \(Priority Need for Accommodation\) \(England\) Order 2002](#)
- [Children Act 1989](#)
- [Children \(Leaving Care\) Act 2000](#)
- [Children Act 2004 \(Section 10\)](#)
- [Children and Social Work Act 2017](#)

1.20 The following is a list of guidance that this document refers to:

- [Joint housing protocols for care leavers: good practice advice](#)
- [Homelessness code of guidance](#)

- [Applying corporate parenting principles to looked after children and care leavers](#)
- [Children Act 1989: care planning, placement and case review](#)
- [Children Act 1989: transition to adulthood for care leavers](#)
- [Extending Personal Adviser support for all care leavers to age 25](#)
- [Local offer guidance](#)
- [Children's social care stable homes built on love consultation](#)
- [HMPPS Care Experience matters good practice document.](#)

1.21 This Protocol should be read in conjunction with the West Sussex Local Offer for care leavers which sets out services and support available from the local authority. For 16- and 17-year-olds, there is a separate Homeless Protocol for young people who are currently not looked after children or care leavers.

- [Leaving Care Local Offer - West Sussex County Council](#)

Consent

1.22 Housing Services and the CLS will need consent from care leavers to share information and support them to understand their rights, entitlements, and options. If consent is not given, the care leaver should be advised although this is their right, we are wanting to provide the best support available, and this is achieved by working together.

2 Transitions planning for care leavers before they leave care

2.1 Accommodation pathway planning for a young person leaving care will be a collaborative process, beginning at 16 years old and ensures the voice of the young person is at the heart of the process. Transitions planning

should involve the young person's social worker (SW), personal adviser (PA), carers, keyworkers, and any other professionals providing support for the young person. The conferencing and reviewing officer (CRO) is responsible for agreeing and ensuring any move on plans/transitions for care leavers are appropriate to their needs.

2.2 It is recognised that skills for independence develop at different times for each young person and that not all care leavers are ready to move into their own accommodation at the same age. Care leavers will usually be expected to move through a pathway of supported accommodation prior to accessing independent living. This is to ensure the young person is in the best position to sustain their own home and therefore to safeguard against homelessness.

Timeline

At 16 years old

2.3 The allocated SW will begin conversations with the young person at 16 about post-18 accommodation. Carers and keyworkers will support with this and be involved in discussions around preferred area of choice, type of accommodation and pathways into independent living. Care leavers will be added to at least one West Sussex housing register at 16 years old.

At 17 years old

2.4 A joint housing pathway planning meeting (JHPPM) will be held between the care leaver, housing options officer, SW, and PA as soon after the young person's 17th birthday as possible. The children we care for (CWCF) team manager will confirm this meeting has been booked in at the supervision prior to the young person turning 17. The JHPPM will be a conversation led by the care leaver to explore aspirations for accommodation as they leave care. The housing options officer will provide the young person with sufficient information about what is realistic and achievable in their preferred location for them to make an informed decision on what is most appropriate for their ambitions.

2.5 The JHPPM will be facilitated by the local housing authority where the young person wishes to live after their 18th birthday. If the young person lives outside of West Sussex and would like to remain living in the area, a JHPPM will be offered to ensure the young person is aware of their options if they were to choose to return to West Sussex. At the conclusion of the JHPPM, the agreed actions will be written up by the SW and copied to the care leaver and housing options officer. The conferencing and reviewing officer will confirm this has been completed in the following CWCF review.

2.6 If the young person presents with unmet care and support needs, the SW will make a referral to the West Sussex transitions panel. This panel will assess if any additional support can be offered to the young person. In some circumstances this may lead to an offer of funded accommodation by adult social care. At 17 years and 6 months

2.7 Care leavers should know what their accommodation move on plans are by 17 and six months of age. Where there is uncertainty, contingency planning should be in place and agreed with the young person.

At 17 years and 10 months

2.8 The final CWCF review should take place no later than two months prior to the young person's 18th birthday. A confirmed post-18 housing plan should be in place by this time if the young person has not already moved, and the care leaver's pathway plan will be updated to reflect the current plan.

At 17 years and 11 months

2.9 A final joint supervision will take place between the CWCF team and the CLS at least one month prior to the young person's 18th birthday to ensure a smooth transition. The transfer checklist will be completed between CWCF and CLS and will confirm that 'what if' safety and contingency plans are in place.

At 18 years old

2.10 The young person will transition from the CWCF care team to the CLS.

Roles and Responsibilities

2.11 The SW and PA will have a joint responsibility to ensure the actions required to secure post-18 accommodation are completed. This can include referrals to the youth homelessness prevention team (YHPT), applications to the local housing authority housing registers and arranging viewings for private rented accommodation.

2.12 The CRO will ensure the actions detailed in (2.1-2.10) are completed and if suitable accommodation has not been identified, the young person can remain open to the CRO service post-18 until a time this is secured. The CRO will decide if this is appropriate and follow escalation policy with any worries.

2.13 The team managers of the CWCF and CLS will have oversight of the transitions process and immediately communicate any concerns.

2.14 The housing options officer will be responsible for facilitating the request for the JHPPM, support with the actions agreed from this meeting and will be available for any further support and advice required by and for the young person.

2.15 Accommodation planning will also include contributions from all support services involved in care for the young person, including adult social care, mental health services, housing related support services, keyworkers and foster carers.

3 Helping care leavers to prepare for independent living

3.1 Preparation for independent living training will be provided to all young people in care, starting at the latest from 16 years old and progress of this will be discussed at every subsequent CWCF review.

3.2 Care leavers living in supported accommodation have access to structured independent living skills and tenancy preparation training. The children's commissioning team will monitor this.

3.3 Foster carers have access to support and training to help care leavers prepare for independent living. This will be co-ordinated and monitored by the fostering and kinship service.

3.4 Readiness for independent living will be assessed by the PA/SW, with contributions from all professionals involved and included in their needs assessment and pathway planning. This may include the current accommodation provider/carer and adult SW.

The PA and young person will complete the readiness to live independently assessment which will inform if a care leaver is tenancy ready. The voice of the young person will be evident throughout the pathway planning and will inform any decisions made around readiness to live independently.

4 Accommodation and support options for care leavers

4.1 A range of accommodation and support options are available for West Sussex care leavers when they leave care. As corporate parents, we commit to ensure young people can access the support to build the skills required for independent living.

Staying put

4.2 A Staying put arrangement is where a former looked after child remains in the foster home when they turn 18. This arrangement can be available to young people aged 18-21 (or up to their 25th birthday if they are in education). Six monthly pathway planning will keep this arrangement under review, ensuring all housing options are discussed, and post-25 planning is in place. One option may be to continue living at the accommodation in a private arrangement.

Supported lodgings

4.3 Supported lodgings is an accommodation scheme for young people who need a secure and supportive environment in which to stay. Supported lodgings carers provide accommodation and support to young people in their home. The scheme is open to young people aged 16-21 (or up to their 25th birthday if they are in education). Six monthly pathway planning will keep this arrangement under review, ensuring all housing options are discussed and post-25 planning is in place. One option may be to continue living at the accommodation in a private arrangement.

Supported accommodation

4.4 Supported accommodation projects are commissioned across West Sussex and provide varying levels of support to care leavers and other young people in housing need. Each young person in supported housing will have a keyworker to support with developing independent living skills and to become 'tenancy ready.'

4.5 Hostel/foyer type supported accommodation with 24-hour staffing provides a safe and stable environment with a higher level of support to help young people develop daily living skills and become ready for independent living. Care leavers can stay in hostel/foyer type accommodation for up to two years and move on will usually be into semi-independent accommodation. If the young person is assessed as no longer requiring keyworker support, the young person will be supported directly into independent accommodation.

4.6 Semi-independent accommodation (including transitional housing) includes smaller shared housing projects with visiting keyworker support. The young person will continue to build independent living skills and this type of accommodation is suitable for care leavers with lower support needs. Semi-independent accommodation is available for up to two years and care leavers will be supported into independent housing when they have demonstrated they are ready to move on.

Housing for young people with disabilities

4.7 Young people with disabilities may need more support than general needs housing can offer to live independently. For example, they may have eligible care and support needs under the Care Act 2014. Housing options may include living independently with support, Shared Lives, residential or funded supported housing. The PA and adult SW will work together as part of the assessment process and transition planning.

4.8 Adult social care or PA will support care leavers who may require adaptations assessments for their home. If a care leaver wants to be considered for a Disabled Facilities Grant, WSCC will arrange for an occupational therapist to contact them. They will assess their health- based needs and discuss what changes they may need at home, and whether they would be considered eligible for funding. If the occupational therapist considers that grant funded adaptation works are required, they will make a formal recommendation to their local council, who will begin the application process. Apply for equipment for your home if you're disabled - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

House Project

4.9 House Projects are co-designed with young people. They work together to develop relationships and learn skills that enable them to live successful adult lives. They have a choice in where they live and are involved in getting their property ready to become their home. West Sussex Districts and Boroughs work alongside the young people in identifying a property for them when they are tenancy ready. [Home | The House Project | West Sussex](#)

Education

4.10 We are committed to supporting young people to aim to have high aspirations in education training and employment choices. Care leavers may wish to travel the world and join an overseas voluntary work experience, attend college, or go to university. Whatever care leavers choose to do, the PA will explore all available housing options. If the young person chooses to go to university, they will be entitled to a CLS bursary of £3,000 spread over the 3 years to help them with day to day living. Care leavers can also access up to an additional £500 education allowance from the CLS and accommodation will be paid for outside of term time. The PA will support to access grants from charities and student finance will be approached for additional funding.

Living with family

4.11 Some care leavers choose to return to live with immediate or extended family when they leave care. This process will be carefully planned between the young person, the family members involved, the PA and the SW.

Suitability of accommodation

4.12 Guidance for the suitability of accommodation for care leavers is provided in the Children Act 1989: Vol 2 and Vol 3.

4.13 The strategic housing and commissioning team at WSCC will ensure that commissioned supported housing meets the criteria referred to (4.12).

4.14 The procurement marketing & QA placements team at WSCC will ensure that staying put and supported lodgings meets the criteria referred to (4.12).

4.15 The PA will make it clear to the young person what to do in the event they are not satisfied with the suitability of the support or accommodation where they live. This will include raising it with the PA or speaking directly to their keyworker or carer regarding any concern. If the issue remains unresolved, the young person will be asked to notify the SW or PA for support with escalating the concern. The SW or PA will raise the concern with the appropriate providers directly and or commissioning team as detailed in 4.13 and 4.14.

4.16 The supported housing keyworker will inform the young person as they move in of how to raise a complaint about the support and accommodation if the young person has concerns. Each commissioned service will have a complaints process, and this should be clearly displayed in the accommodation where the young person lives.

Referral routes

4.17 Referrals into supported accommodation will be co-ordinated by the YHPT at WSCC. All referrals into and between supported housing provision will be facilitated by the YHPT.

4.18 Referrals into supported accommodation can be submitted by the SW, PA or housing options officer.

4.19 Referrals between supported accommodation projects can be submitted by the SW, PA or project keyworker.

4.20 Referrals into staying put and supported lodgings accommodation will be coordinated by the commissioning team for young people and strategic housing at WSCC.

5 Support to prevent and relieve homelessness

Early intervention tools to prevent and relieve homelessness

5.1 Financial assistance is available to both prevent and relieve homelessness. For homelessness prevention, the housing and care leavers services will explore all the funds available from both services to support short term interventions to prevent the loss of accommodation. This can include discretionary housing payments, money management support, cost of living support and hardship payments.

5.2 For the relief of homelessness, the housing service will work with the care leavers service to access private rented accommodation as an option. This could be in the form of a grant or a loan to cover rent in advance, tenancy deposit and other costs associated with moving to alternative accommodation. Any funds agreed will be dependent on assessment of readiness, suitability, and affordability. PAs will ensure each young person has completed an assessment of readiness to live independently and this will be shared with the local housing authority.

5.3 At the start of a tenancy or license, the PA (with the care leavers consent) will share their contact details with the landlord or housing officer with the express purpose the landlord can contact the PA to obtain advice and support if they believe the tenancy to be at risk. The PA will document this agreement and share with housing where applicable.

5.4 The PA and/or care leavers support worker will offer support to set up rent payments, utility bills, council tax, registering with dentist and GPs and ensure the young person has what they need as they move into the new property.

5.5 The option of alternative payment arrangements (APAs) via the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) will be discussed with the young person in circumstances where they have a history of significant rent arrears or difficulties with money management.

5.6 Referrals for tenancy sustainment support (via care leavers housing support workers and pathways home schemes) will be made when a care leavers tenancy is at risk. The PA will make internal referrals for housing support, and the housing officer will make referrals to the pathways home scheme.

5.7 If there is a risk of homelessness and adult social care are providing services due to eligible care and support needs, the PA will inform with consent, at the earliest convenience both the adult social care team and the service supporting the young person. The PA will invite both to any meetings being held in respect of this.

5.8 PAs will facilitate a meeting between all parties and provide support where a tenancy, placement or return to a family home is at risk of breaking down. PAs will continue to explore all options to sustain tenancies and prevent homelessness including encouraging young people to work with housing and local services to avoid homelessness and rough sleeping.

Joint working to deliver homelessness reduction act duties

5.9 Where a PA knows a care leaver is threatened with homelessness within 56 days, a duty to refer will be emailed by them (with consent) to the local housing authority where the young person wishes to live. Every housing application from a care leaver will be triaged by the relevant housing service as soon as possible and contact made with the care leaver and PA to arrange a face to face (where possible) appointment to make a full assessment of their housing needs.

5.10 The current care leaver pathway plan will (with consent) be shared with the local housing authority and this will inform the housing assessment. A personalised housing plan (PHP) will be developed based on the housing assessment and contain steps to be taken to prevent or relieve the young person's homelessness. The PHP will detail actions for the care leaver, housing service and CLS.

5.11 If the care leaver is homeless on the day and has no alternative short term housing opportunities, the PA will inform the local housing authority immediately and support the young person to the housing offices or as directed by the housing options officer.

5.12 If a care leaver applies to a local housing authority for homeless assistance, the housing options officer will (with consent) notify the CLS. The PA (or duty PA if the allocated PA is not available) will contact the young person and (with consent) attend the housing office to offer additional support.

5.13 If there is a duty to provide interim accommodation, the local housing authority will provide the means for the young person to move to their interim accommodation with their belongings. If the young person is unable to move any belongings to this accommodation, the local housing authority will protect the belongings by moving it to storage or to a place of safety confirmed by the young person.

5.14 PAs will support care leavers to move into interim accommodation and should support the young person with this move. If a PA is not available on the day, a duty PA will attend. The allocated PA will then visit the property as soon as possible and no later than five days. The young person's pathway plan will be updated within 28 days of any move.

5.15 Bed and breakfast (otherwise known as nightly paid shared accommodation (NPSA) type accommodation is not suitable for care leavers and as such every effort will be made to ensure self-contained accommodation is offered to young people who are made homeless.

5.16 The local housing authority will complete a risk assessment to determine this is suitable as an emergency measure and plans put in place to move to more suitable accommodation as soon as possible. The risk assessment will be shared with the CLS.

5.17 The PA will be responsible to assess the young person's ability to sustain their interim accommodation and their support needs. A referral to a CLS support worker will be made if appropriate based on this assessment. This will include recommendations of how regular visits should be and for what timescales. If it is considered the young person may have adult care and support needs, this assessment will take place with their Adult Social Worker.

6 Care leavers leaving custody

6.1 With consent of the care leaver, PA visits and pathway planning will continue for the course of the prison sentence, automatically up to the age of 21 and can continue up to 25 if the care leaver so wishes. The young person will be visited within 10 working days of being imprisoned and the pathway plan will be updated within 28 days. This plan will include aspirations of where the young person wishes to live upon release.

6.2 A JHPPM should take place at least three months prior to release and should be followed up with a duty to refer at 56 days prior to release if required. This meeting should involve the young person, PA, probation officer, and housing options officer. The meeting should include an assessment of need, which will inform the type of accommodation being considered for the young person upon release.

6.3 The PA will complete a referral within three months of release to supported housing via the YHPT. The YHPT will ensure the referral is processed in timescales to ensure the young person moves directly into supported housing upon release where possible, therefore avoiding any time in emergency or temporary accommodation.

6.4 The PA will make a referral to the care leavers housing support worker to explore private rented options if deemed appropriate for the young person's needs. This referral will be made at the same time as the duty to refer.

6.5 The PA will keep the housing options officer updated throughout this period as agreed appropriate to the term of imprisonment. This will include relevant and significant updates. Should alternative accommodation not be available upon release, support under homelessness legislation will be requested.

7 Care leavers living outside the children's services authority area

7.1 Care leavers living outside the children's service area can either remain in this area after they reach 18 or choose to return to live in West Sussex. The decision will be young person led, and the SW and PA will support the decision made by the young person.

7.2 Care leavers will be supported to join a local housing register outside of West Sussex and at least one housing register in West Sussex at 16 years old.

7.3 A JHPPM should take place at 17 years old for all West Sussex care leavers, including young people living outside of West Sussex. This will be a joint meeting between the young person, PA, current housing provider and West Sussex local housing authority of the young person's choice. This meeting should inform the young person of their housing options going forward and set actions to support with move on.

7.4 If a care leaver wishes to remain living outside of West Sussex post 18, support should be offered to apply to the local housing register and

support to access private rented accommodation if they are 'tenancy ready'. The CLS, following assessment may offer financial support to young people wishing to access private rented accommodation outside of West Sussex, as per 9.8 of this protocol. If the young person requires supported housing, the SW or PA should explore processes of accessing this where the young person lives, including seeking advice from the local CLS. A duty to refer may be required by the local housing authority to enable referral into supported accommodation in the area. A duty to refer should also be submitted if the current accommodation is due to end within 56 days and an alternative has not been identified.

7.5 If a care leaver wishes to return to West Sussex at 18, the PA should ensure the young person has an open housing register application in the area they wish to live. Support should be offered by the PA to access private rented accommodation and bid for social housing properties if considered 'tenancy ready.' If the young person is assessed as requiring supported housing, a YHPT referral should be made so the relevant level of supported housing can be accessed.

8 Accommodation options for 21–25-year-old care leavers

8.1 Care leavers aged 21-25 years old who return to the CLS for support under extended duties will receive the same support and advice around accommodation as those who have remained open to the service.

8.2 Care leavers aged 21-25 will receive support from their PA to access private rented and social housing as detailed in section 9 of this document. Care leavers will also have access to supported accommodation as detailed in section 4.

8.3 Supported lodgings and staying put accommodation will continue to be made available for 21–25-year-old care leavers if they remain in education, however they must be in this arrangement prior to turning 21 years old to qualify.

8.4 Care leavers aged 18–20 have 'priority need' under homelessness legislation and the local housing authority consider this when assessing duties to provide longer term housing. Care leavers over 21 years old are not automatically considered to be in 'priority need', and the local housing authority will assess whether the young person is considered vulnerable because they were looked after. The local housing authority will contact the CLS (with consent from the young person) to support with this assessment and communicate the outcome.

8.5 The local housing authority will investigate if the young person is considered in priority need for any other reason.

8.6 If the young person is considered not to be in priority need, a meeting will be held between the local housing authority, the CLS, and the young person to discuss alternative housing options. The care leaver will remain open to the local housing authority until a time that suitable alternative accommodation has been identified and accessed.

9 Move on accommodation

9.1 For the purpose of this protocol, 'move on accommodation' can be described as more settled accommodation for care leavers including social housing, private rented accommodation and owner-occupied accommodation.

Social housing

9.2 All care leavers will be able to access the housing register of their choice within West Sussex on or after their 16th birthday. Each district or borough has their own locally agreed and adopted allocations policy. Some operate direct nominations and others have a choice-based lettings scheme. West Sussex looked after children should be supported to join at least one housing register by 16 years and three months. Where a young person becomes looked after following their 16th birthday, support to join a housing register should occur within three months of becoming looked after.

9.3 The responsibility to ensure a housing register application is open at 16 and up to the age of 18 sits with the allocated CWCF SW. The responsibility after 18 sits with the allocated PA. Although it is the allocated worker's responsibility to ensure a housing register application is open, the application itself can be completed by any professional working with the young person including keyworkers at placements, foster carers and supported lodgings providers.

9.4 By virtue of being a child looked after by West Sussex, a care leaver has a local connection to all the West Sussex county area and can choose which one of the Councils' housing services they wish to apply to. Each housing service has an established application assessment process in place to determine what assistance is available and any priority award for the housing register.

9.5 Care leavers will be awarded the appropriate level of priority on the housing register in accordance with the relevant council's allocation policy, to help them to secure accommodation in a timely manner when they reach 18 years of age.

9.6 As described in 9.2, the districts and boroughs have locally agreed assessment criteria to access social housing. The care leavers service will identify with the young person, which is the most appropriate person to support the care leaver through the bidding or nomination process if they need help. This may include the PA, keyworker, the housing options officer or the housing officer.

Private rented accommodation

9.7 When a care leaver wishes to move from their current accommodation and is neither homeless nor threatened with homelessness, the CLS, following assessment, may offer rent in advance and deposit to secure a tenancy. The first month's rent in advance does not need to be repaid. The deposit will be set up to be paid back to WSCC with the option to use this for future accommodation if this is agreed.

9.8 Following assessment, the CLS may act as a corporate guarantor for up to 12 months or pay up to six months' rent in advance. The districts and boroughs in West Sussex have individual policies and schemes to help prevent homelessness and to assist applicants in securing accommodation in the privately rented sector. The relevant housing service will provide advice and guidance to the care leaver and their PA on the use of discretionary housing payments (DHP), rent in advance, tenancy deposits, loans, grants, furniture packages and other financial assistance that may be available from the housing service.

9.9 Care leavers seeking accommodation in the private rented sector who are threatened with homelessness will also be referred to the care leavers housing support worker who has established links with local and out of area letting agents.

General (for social and private rented housing)

9.10 The importance of good references being used when securing either social or privately rented accommodation will be explained by the PA when exploring future housing options.

9.11 The CLS will pay for removals/van hire when a young person moves into independent accommodation. The CLS also has bags and boxes suitable for moving young people's belongings and all care leavers should have access to their own suitcase.

9.12 PAs will support care leavers to move into their new properties and should be present at tenancy sign up. If a PA is not available on the day of sign up, a duty PA will attend. The allocated PA will then visit the property as soon as possible and no later than five days. The young person's pathway plan will be updated within 28 days of any move.

9.13 The PA will be responsible to assess the young person's ability to sustain a tenancy and their support needs. A referral to a CLS support worker will be made if appropriate based on this assessment. This will include recommendations of how regular visits should be and for what timescales. If it is considered the young person may have adult care and support needs, this assessment will take place with their Adult Social Worker.

9.14 The PA and/or care leavers support worker will offer support to set up rent payments and utility bills and ensure the young person has what they need as they move into the new property. The CLS offer a £75 moving in voucher to buy smaller items such as tea towels, saucepans, cups, cutlery, plates, cleaning products etc.

9.15 A setting up home allowance (SUHA) of £3000 is available to help young people furnish their independent accommodation. The young person's pathway plan will be updated within 28 days of moving into the new property and shared with the young person. A copy will be provided to the young person within two weeks of completion.

9.16 At the start of a tenancy, the PA will request consent from the care leaver to liaise with the landlord. The landlord (social or private) can then update the PA (or a separate named contact or service) where there is a risk of tenancy breakdown including where rent arrears are accumulating or there are concerns around anti-social behaviour.

9.17 If the care leaver is having difficulty managing their tenancy, and the PA believes additional support is required, consent should be sought from the young person to refer to a floating support service. This may be provided by the housing support worker in the CLS, or by 'Pathways Home' which can be accessed via the Local Housing Authority.

9.18 Care leavers will be exempt from paying council tax up until their 22nd birthday. The PA will ensure the single person's discount (if applicable) and council tax reduction is applied for. The CLS will fund the remaining balance.

Home ownership

9.19 Any care leavers purchasing their own home will be offered £5,000 from West Sussex County Council, payable to their solicitor on completion of the purchase.

This offer is available to all West Sussex care leavers up to the age of 25.

9.20 PAs can support with budgeting and money management and support young people with their aspirations for the future around this. Schemes such as help to buy, and shared ownership may be suitable for some care leavers and PAs will support those who wish to move into home ownership by signposting to relevant schemes.

10 Advanced Joint Contingency Planning to Prevent Homelessness

10.1 Children's services and local housing authorities will have a joint responsibility to ensure that contingency planning is in place in respect of accommodation. In circumstances where the young person is threatened with homelessness, this joint working will be triggered with the submission of a 'duty to refer,' as detailed in section 5.9 of this protocol.

10.2 A multi-agency team around the young person will (with consent) communicate together to minimise and manage the risk of homelessness. This may be particularly helpful when supporting young people with more complex needs.

10.3 Where there is a risk of a staying put or supported lodgings arrangement breaking down, a 'disruption meeting' will be convened by the PA or supervising SW. If the arrangement is not sustainable following this meeting, a duty to refer will be sent to the appropriate local housing authority.

10.4 Prevention of eviction meetings will take place when a young person's supported accommodation first report this is at risk. If the provider has not already arranged a meeting, the PA will request a meeting is held within five working days. If the matter is more imminent, this can be set up for the same day. If the PA is not available on the day, a duty PA and a team manager will attend.

Discharge of interim duty to accommodate

10.5 If circumstances arise where a care leaver is likely to be evicted from interim accommodation following a homeless application, a meeting will take place between the housing options officer, PA and young person to discuss whether this can be prevented, and if not, what the next steps will be. The PA, housing options officer and young person will agree to invite any additional professionals to this meeting. This meeting will review the circumstances and ensure that corporate parenting principles are being considered, and consultation will be undertaken with a senior housing worker before making any final decisions.

Intentionally homeless decisions

10.6 The Homelessness Code of Guidance (22.17) states that 'all attempts should be made by housing authorities to avoid the impact of intentionally homeless decisions in relation to care leavers aged 18 – 25'. Local Housing Authorities will share information with the CLS and 'obtain advice and information as to the young person's emotional and mental well-being, maturity, and general ability to understand the impact of their actions. We, as corporate parents, share a commitment to work together to ensure a plan is in place that will prevent continued homelessness of our young people.

10.7 Prevention is at the heart of the approach in this protocol and the ongoing conversations between the two services will be key. The intention of this protocol is that care leavers are supported by the partners to this document not to reach the position where they need to make a homeless application. A 'team around the person' approach is recommended.

10.8 In advance of any intentionally homeless decision, the housing and care leavers' services will work together to identify the circumstances and all the options available to prevent this. Intentionally homeless decisions will be a last resort if all else has failed. If the local housing authority are considering making an intentionally homeless decision, a 'minded to' meeting will first take place between the young person, case worker and PA. This meeting will review the circumstances and ensure that corporate parenting principles are being considered when making decisions.

10.9 The Homeless code of Guidance (22.18) states that 'Before signing off a negative intentional homelessness decision for a care leaver, senior leaders should review the circumstances that have given rise to the decision, and take full account of their corporate parenting responsibilities, which must include considering any duties under the Children Act. This might, for example, mean that children's services provide accommodation as an alternative'. IH notification template [here](#)

10.10 If an intentionally homeless decision is made, the local housing authority will inform the young person and the care leavers service of this at the earliest opportunity, to ensure that there is a shared understanding of this decision; including what it means for the young person and their housing options going forward.

10.11 Where there is a duty to do so, the housing service will provide accommodation for a reasonable period (usually 28 days) following an intentionally homeless decision to support the care leaver with time to find alternative accommodation provided that the care leaver adheres to the terms and conditions of the accommodation.

11 Escalation

11.1 This section maps out the routes of escalation and details ways of resolving disputes which may arise in relation to the support and accommodation offered to care leavers.

Professionals

11.2 All staff involved in delivering this protocol are expected to work positively together in the best interests of the young person as per the principles of corporate parenting. However, it is recognised that on occasion differences of opinion and assessment will arise. Such differences should, whenever possible, be resolved through discussion between those staff directly involved.

11.3 If any of the districts or boroughs or the county council cannot agree on any aspect of the individual case or provision of services, the matter will initially be discussed at team manager level, between the care leaver team manager and the appropriate housing options manager in the district or borough for resolution. If these managers cannot reach agreement, the matter should be referred to the service manager in CLS and the equivalent in the district or borough for resolution.

11.4 If these managers cannot reach agreement, the matter should be referred to the head of service for CLS and the equivalent in the local housing authority.

Care leavers

11.5 If the care leaver is unhappy with the service received from children's services or the local housing authority in respect of advice, support and decisions around accommodation, the PA will support with advocating for the young person.

11.6 If the dispute relates to the advice, support or decisions made by the PA, the care leaver will request to speak to the team manager or service manager of the CLS.

11.7 The young person will be informed by their PA of the WSCC advocacy service who can support to make a formal complaint if required.

12 Embedding and reviewing

12.1 The CLS and local housing authorities will work together to ensure training is delivered to support embedding of the protocol in practice. Joint training will be delivered between local housing authorities and children's services four monthly in the first year of launch and six monthly after this at practice level. Care leavers will be involved in embedding and reviewing the protocol.

12.2 The protocol will be reviewed annually by the signatories. Ongoing monitoring of the protocol will be carried out at regular meetings of the strategic homelessness group and overseen by the strategic housing group. Monitoring of the protocol will also be carried out by the care leavers advisory board (CLAB) and the voice and participation team.

12.3 Annually reviewing this protocol helps to ensure it is a live and up to date document and enables partners to confirm their shared responsibilities as corporate parents.

Next Steps

12.4 We will be:

- working closely with our registered providers and council housing management teams in aspects of the commitments within this protocol.
- developing joint training for frontline workers.
- exploring reciprocal arrangements in neighbouring areas in respect of supported and social housing.
- exploring improving support to young people with social housing tenancies who wish to attend university elsewhere in the country.

13 Signatories

Daniel Ruaux	West Sussex County Council
Rob Jarvis	Adur & Worthing Councils
Richard Tomkinson	Arun District Council
Kerry Standing	Chichester District Council
Diana Maughan	Crawley Borough Council
Andrew Smith	Horsham District Council
Margaret Gates	Mid Sussex District Council

14 Glossary

Advocacy Team	An independent service which aims to help young people access and understand information about themselves, say what they think and feel and help to tell others what they need. The Advocacy service and you
Allocations Policy	This describes the local approach adopted by the councillors in each district or borough which sets out how the Housing Register works in each area and functions such as banding and priorities for housing.
Alternative Payment Arrangements (APA)	The setting up of an arrangement to enable the housing costs component of universal credit to be paid direct to the landlord from the DWP where appropriate.
Assessment of Readiness to Live Independently	Assessment used by the CLS working with care leavers to help determine if they are ready to live independently.
Care Leavers Housing Support Worker	Working within the CLS, provides intensive support to care leavers to prevent homelessness and secure stable housing.
Care Leavers Service (CLS)	West Sussex County Council's CLS is a statutory service supporting care leavers to leave care at 18 and to gain the necessary skills to live independently and achieve their goals and aspirations.
Care Leavers Support Worker	Working within the CLS, providing additional practical support to care leavers.
Children We Care For (CWCF)	Children in the care of the local authority.
Choice Based Lettings (CBL)	CBL is the term used to describe a local authority managed system for applying for a rented home. CBL schemes allow an applicant to make choices about where they want to live by making a bid for a property being advertised. Bids are prioritised by banding or priority and for properties that are suitable for the applicant's situation. CBL operates in all the district and borough areas except for Horsham.
Conferencing and Reviewing Officer (CRO)	Conference Reviewing Officer is an independent role. Their role is to make sure children and young people's views are heard and acted on and the plans in place are right for them.
Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)	DWP is responsible for supporting people into work, welfare benefits, pensions and child maintenance.
Direct Lets	Is where a local authority or a social landlord may make a direct offer to a housing applicant outside of a CBL scheme.

Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP)	Additional payment that can be made available via the local authority revenues and benefits services, to provide short-term financial assistance to individuals. Typical circumstances where DHP may be requested are short-term difficulties in meeting rent payments, funds to assist with rent in advance or deposits to secure alternative accommodation. DHP awards are made in accordance with the relevant locally adopted and agreed policy and are at the discretion of the local authority revenues and benefits team following consideration of the individual's circumstances and purpose of the request.
Disruption Meeting	Meeting to prevent a breakdown of a placement.
Duty to Refer (DTR)	A guide to the duty to refer - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)
Housing Options Manager (HOM)	Describes the senior manager responsible for services relating to housing advice, options, homelessness, housing needs, temporary accommodation management and housing register.
Housing Options Officer (HOO)	Describes a front-line case worker dealing with housing needs assessments, giving advice, discussing options, placing people into temporary accommodation.
Housing Register	The way each district and borough housing services holds the names and applications for all those who have applied for housing in their area.
Housing Service	Role of housing in general.
Joint Housing Pathway Planning Meeting (JHPPM)	The JHPPM is a housing meeting to inform pathway planning for care leavers. In the meeting the care leaver will explore their aspirations and be provided with information on housing pathways available for them. This takes place as soon after the young person's 17 th birthday and is held between the care leaver, housing options officer, SW, and PA.
Local Housing Authority (LHM)	Legal body responsible for the implementation of the homeless legislation.
Minded to Letter	a non-statutory approach to notify a homeless applicant that the local authority will most likely be issuing an intentionally homeless decision.
Nightly Paid Shared Accommodation (NPSA)	Describes non-self-contained accommodation paid at a nightly rate. This can include some B&B accommodation where facilities are shared.
Pathways Home	Housing Support service operating in all areas of West Sussex, jointly funded through WSCC and the seven local authorities in West Sussex.

Personal Adviser (PA)	Personal advisers support care leavers to develop the skills needed to live independently and to be aspirational in identifying and achieving their goals, including healthy living, stable homes, relationships, education, training and employment opportunities.
Personalised Housing Plan (PHP)	This is the joint document (applicable to all potentially homeless households) which sets out the reasonable steps that are going to be taken by both the housing service, other agencies or services and the care leaver to prevent the care leaver becoming homeless or to relieve their homelessness.
Registered Provider (RP)	(Registered Providers (RPs) also known as Housing Associations are organisations that are run independently from councils. They are the main developers of new homes in the social housing sector and provide housing for people. The Regulator of Social Housing manages the statutory register of social housing providers (the register) which lists private (non-profit and profit-making) providers and local authority providers.
Service Manager (SM) - Care Leavers Service	Responsible for overseeing the day to day running of the CLS. Reporting to a head of service for care leavers and corporate parenting.
Social Worker (SW) - Children We Care For	Provides statutory social work service to children and young people in the care of the local authority, including assessment, permanency planning and review.
Team Manager (TM) - Care Leavers Service	Responsible for supporting and managing a team of personal advisers. Reports to the service manager.
Youth Homelessness Prevention Team (YHPT)	Responsible for preventing homelessness for 16 & 17 year olds and referring and supporting young people for joint housing assessments and supported housing projects across West Sussex.